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ABSTRACT

The Western model of education is based on reductionism and linear thinking motivated by profit for those at the top. Globalization is the zenith of this Western reductionist philosophy. Its proponents talk about technology providing access to new vocational opportunities, yet fewer people control more of the resources and services. People find that globalization marginalizes them and their communities as jobs, services, and workers leave. It is time to reject the ethnocentric vision that Western education is best. Human potential can be unlocked through holistic education using strategies that Indigenous cultures have used for millennia. Indigenous cultures are community-based and integrate spiritualism, knowledge, skills, law, and responsibility into a seamless cloth of experience. They utilize a practical, experiential methodology of seeing, doing, feedback, and sharing. Holistic education based on Indigenous methodologies is a dynamic, open human relationship that cultivates a critical awareness of the many contexts of learners' lives--moral, cultural, ecological, economical, technological, and political. Such an education recognizes and respects that human intelligence is expressed through diverse styles and capacities. Learning is active, self-motivated, supportive, and encouraging of the human spirit. A holistic curriculum is interdisciplinary, integrating community and global perspectives. If humanity is to survive this millennium, there must be a major paradigm shift toward the community-based approaches of Indigenous peoples. (TD)

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Revitalising Marginalised Communities by Increasing Social Capital Through Holistic Education of the Lifelong Learning Strategies of Indigenous Peoples

By

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Revitalising marginalised communities by increasing social capital through holistic education and the lifelong learning strategies of Indigenous peoples

By Rupert Collister

Abstract

At the dawn of the 21st Century there is much talk about technology, education and empowering the populations of the world. The politicians use rhetoric about technology providing access to new vocational opportunities as they remove services from smaller, and increasingly, medium sized communities. Globalisation is touted as being the 'great white hope' for the world bringing us all closer together. All the while it is globalisation that forces the closure of businesses of all sizes that cannot compete with the global magnates or in the environment they have created. Previously rich and diverse communities wither and die as the 'ethnic cleansing' of globalisation and 'western reductionism' march on. Communities will disappear into one Americanised homogenous group if we allow this march to continue.

What of the people? For it is the people who are suffering as a result of these policies. Ironically it is the people who have the power. Power to meet, power to educate themselves in the skills they want and need, power to exchange ideas, power to learn new skills and adopt new strategies. People have the power to force social change when they realise they are not alone. Human potential can be unlocked and focussed through education, by utilising many of the strategies that have kept Indigenous culture alive through centuries of oppression. It is time to reject the ethnocentric vision that 'western' education is the best for all. We need to learn from the holistic strategies that Indigenous cultures use, to support lifelong learning and promote community well being, to stop the destruction of our diverse world family.

Introduction

As globalisation marches inextricably onwards many people are beginning to turn away from it. They see globalisation as the zenith of the western reductionist philosophy, which encourages everything to be broken down into its constituent parts, each part is then refined to be faster, cheaper, more adaptable and multinational. At the same time fewer and fewer people control more of the resources and services. Globalisation allows no room for any concept that supports the idea 'the whole is greater that the some of its parts' i.e. like love. Reductionism is everything. So where do the globalisation luddites go? In many cases they are exploring the eastern philosophies of Daoism, Buddhism and Indigenous wisdom of the Native peoples of the world. They are attracted by the connection with the land and communitarianism of these philosophies in an age where

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cynical industries destroy the environment on the one hand and receiving credits for planting trees etc on the other.

Many people are beginning to see that we are connected to the land and environment and cannot continue to exist unless there is a fundamental change in attitudes of the human race. On his Website Spider Spirit quotes Chief Seattle as saying:

> Human kind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.
> (http://community-2.webtv.net/Spider_Spirit/TheSpiderWeb/)

Who can argue with that? But if all things are bound together then we are all responsible for what happens. Dhyani Ywahoo (1987, p. 135) said:

> Often we have looked to others to give direction and leadership, to bring things correct. But what is someone leading and what is following? A strong community develops whole vision, considering future generations.

Full Citizenship means taking an active role in the construction and administration of society as a member of a community. Globalisation removes that role and responsibility from all but a few people in the world.

Globalisation is not only destroying the planet but communities and individuals too. If we allow this to continue the 'new citizenship' for the new millennium will be individuals scratching out a living by working in meaningless jobs that provide no quality of life for, in many countries, subsistence wages. Globalisation is creating a generation of 'robber barons' for the 21st Century, this time they are using media, technology and the money markets but the effect on the populace is the same. Marginalisation is coming for many people who previously felt untouchable and is well and truly here for those less fortunate in our society. As globalisation increases the sense of 'Nation' will be diminished exponentially and the sense of community will be a dim memory.

This paper is a brief summation of extensive and on-going research I am undertaking into opportunities to utilise the strategies that have maintained Indigenous cultures for centuries, coupled with modern holistic education methodology and the current training agenda to revitalise marginalised communities. I will briefly discuss who are the marginalised? Communities, social capital and full citizenship, holistic education and finally lifelong learning and Indigenous people. Finally I will conclude by discussing the similarities in these approaches and how we can use them to bring full citizenship to our communities.

Who are the marginalised?

Marginalisation occurs in both rural and metropolitan areas, often by 'stealth'. Businesses are closed or relocated to new areas where costs can be reduced, new investment isn't forthcoming, population declines through lack of employment opportunities, institutions close and services are reduced. Members of these communities feel betrayed, disillusioned, useless and scared. People find themselves caught up in their own world with their own problems, unaware or uncaring of others around them, trying to fight against a system which victimises the oppressed until they give up. True citizenship is an unattainable abstract to the marginalised. Murray Print (1995, p.9) said:

> Major world developments such as the reunification of Germany, the growth of the European Union (EU) power, the bloody disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, the growth of politico-economic trading blocs, African nationalist movements and so forth have both stimulated and sought to redefine the nature of citizenship. ...The Europeans...are re-examining citizenship in the context of a single, economically-powerful EU. This requires reflection on what it means to be a citizen of both a nation and a regional organisation.

Although this was written in 1995 it still rings true. In many countries there are moves by the people to reassert their rights over the minority classes that rule them. Delineation may occur on the grounds of ethnic background, social status or nationality. The catalyst for many of the circumstances Print mentions above is wealth and power. Yet in most cases once the revolution, coup, reorientation of Government or policy or whatever caused the change is over, the ordinary people find themselves in the same situation they have always been, although they may have a new class of leader, and the march of globalisation will continue. One only need to look at the availability of Western franchises in developing countries to see that. Globalisation is the antithesis of true citizenship. Before too long one will only be able to call oneself a 'citizen' of one trading block or other.

Communities, social capital and full citizenship

Falk, (1999, p.3) quoted Eva Cox (1995), From her Boyer lecture said, "Social capital should be pre-eminent and most valued form of any capital as it provides the basis on which we build a truly civil society." 'Social capital' is a term, which is yet to find an agreed definition, but Falk and Kilpatrick (1999, p.3) define social capital as:

> ...the product of social interactions that may contribute to social, civic or economic well being of a community of common purpose. The interactions draw on knowledge and identity resources and simultaneously use and build stores of social capital. The nature of social capital depends on...the dimension of the various interactions it has produced such as the quality of the internal-external interactions, the historicity, the reciprocity, the trust and shared values and norms.

This definition suggests that without high quality interactions carried out in a non-threatening environment social capital cannot be created. If 'quality' interactions are infrequent social capital will not be 'stored' for continual use by the community. Once trust, shared values and norms are removed or changed due to outside involvement and circumstance the interactions, and thence the quality and quantity of social capital will be adversely affected. High levels of social capital are needed for, and produced by true communities of purpose.

I believe that if we want a vital and inclusive society we need to foster communities of purpose. From these communities of purpose will come an increase in social capital and the members will retake their citizenship and revitalise their community. I am not talking about nationalism of ethnic elitism but real citizenship based on an educated egalitarian community structure.

A brief word on education and worldview

Education has always touched on, and been influenced by, such disciplines as philosophy, sociology, civics, politics and social conscience and holistic education is no different. In fact holistic education has also been influenced by Indigenous wisdom, the environmental movement, women's movement, and human rights advocates. This has led, as I see it, to a number of different areas of focus for holistic educators and theorists. There is a strong movement of holistic educators in the area of children's education. Many of us have heard of Montessori schools, Waldorf schools, "free" schools, "home schooling", integrated curriculum, developmentally appropriate curriculum, and whole language schooling. There are also strong centres of holism related to the environment, promoting environmental education and awareness of the interconnectedness of things. There are also a number of holistic theorists producing material on the philosophical nature of holism. In some cases these theorists come from an Indigenous wisdom background others may come from an area of social justice/action. Some come from conventional religious theory others from the environmental sciences or eastern philosophy.

So what has motivated all these individuals to explore a more acceptable alternative to the status quo? Consciously or unconsciously educators and philosophers are becoming aware of a negative *worldview* that pervades western society today.

> The western model of education is based on a 19th century worldview. This worldview is grounded in reductionism and linear thinking motivated by profit for those at the top and designed for an industrial age, which is declining fast. This worldview is based on a number of assumptions including:
>
> - It is a materialistic worldview where everything is measurable, quantifiable and tangible.
> - It relies on 'scientific' ways of knowing to transform resources into 'wealth'.

- It assumes that human beings are primarily economic beings, motivated by the desire for comfort, luxury and status.
- It assumes divisions between people, based on religion, language, occupation, gender, and ethnicity are more real and enduring than our common humanity.

(Miller, R. 1991, p.1)

As a result of this worldview many people today find their communities marginalised through the unceasing march of globalisation (supported by this outdated paradigm). More and more services are being withdrawn from communities as the industries collapse or are moved to other locations, often off shore for tax benefits or reduced labour costs. As a result many members of the working age population are finding themselves with their jobs being threatened or removed and with slim chance of finding other work in their community. This leads to community populations decreasing as the higher skilled leave to find work elsewhere and the less skilled find themselves dependent on the welfare system. Then the circle of marginalisation is complete.

Conventional education supports this worldview. If we want to reduce and eventually remove the marginalisation of individuals and communities we need a new paradigm where people can find meaning, relevance and value in their life and community. I believe we will find this new paradigm for community well being in holism. Holistic approaches are currently being adopted around the world to help combat depression, youth suicide, and substance and physical abuse. Whilst laudable these programmes target a small number of people in specific circumstances. My vision for holism is that whole communities can adopt a holistic approach and work with each other to revitalise their communities.

Holistic education

Holistic education has had a long history that has moved in 'fits and starts'. It has, at various times, been associated with a variety of alternative and radical movements, either actually or in the perception of the establishment. When one becomes involved in holistic education one immediately finds oneself in general opposition to the status quo supported by mainstream education administration. It is the task of supporters of holistic education to bring to the fore cohesive 'sensible' arguments and explanations of their philosophy. I believe it is also their task to develop a form of education that support the principles of holistic education whilst also fitting in with the administration structures set down by Governments. This may appear to be appeasement, and many holistic educators will say the two are so diametrically opposed that one cannot have both. I believe that the perceived gap is indeed wide, but I do believe we can achieve both, meaningful education and accountability in accordance with current policy, which, is what the regulatory aspects of education really support.

As you will see there is much written about the use of holistic education strategies with children and much abstract theorising. I am interested in how we can use holistic methodology in adult education, particularly in the field of Adult and Community Education (ACE) and revitalising marginalised communities.

Terminology

A key challenge I believe holistic educators' face in relation to widespread acceptance of their philosophy relates to the terminology used in the dialogue. There are many who are put off by some of the language, this sparks surface level discussion and debate without probing some of the deeper issues. However, it is probably the case that people need to be comfortable that their own philosophy can fit in with the ideas behind holistic education, before they can embrace it and accepting the terminology is a step towards that. It is the case that one can read a range of holistic theorists and get slightly different definitions for some of this terminology. I believe one should make one's own definition and be true to that.

Some of the many questions I have faced on this issue are:

What is the difference between 'Wholistic' and 'holistic'?

In my view *Wholistic* refers to the whole person, mind, body and spirit including the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Inferring human behaviour cannot be broken down in to its constituent parts of skills, attitudes, behaviour, emotions etc. On the other hand (or not) the term *Holistic* includes the wholistic but is much more. It refers to the idea that the *whole of reality* is an interconnected whole - holism. Holism means to me that *everything* is connected. No action occurs in isolation. Each movement, each change, each response to stimulus of everything on the Earth affects everything else not only on the Earth but in the universe. Humankind is, and perhaps always was, at best Earth-centric. Harbouring the idea that we are the only intelligent life in the universe and nothing outside matters to us and our actions do not affect it. This is not a holistic viewpoint.

Spirit, spirituality and soul seem to crop up in literature about holistic education a lot. [*either*] Isn't spirit/spirituality an bit 'wishy washy' or 'new age' to be included in a serious education philosophy?

[*or*] Is it right to bring religion that may be alien to the learners into an educational philosophy?

[*or*] is this a concept that applies to the 21st Century?

I have a regular Anglican upbringing and have read widely on holism, Indigenous wisdom and Taoism. Although I don't follow any religious doctrine I believe that one's definition of spirit; spirituality or soul is unique to each individual. I am happy to use the Concise Oxford Dictionary definition of soul as "the moral or emotional or intellectual nature of a person or animal", of spirit as "the vital animating essence of a person or animal…the intelligent non-physical part of a person". What is certain is all cultures refer to spirit and soul and it is beyond our understanding. I would attempt to describe my own view of it as *the moral and ethical core of a person*. It affects the way a person acts and interacts with those and the environment around that person, as such one's spirit/soul is a direct component of holism.

[*Either*] This is all very good but how is it supposed to work with the education system we have now?

[*or*] I can see how this would work for children in schools but how can it work with adults?

I believe in order for holistic education strategies to work in any situation there needs to be a teacher/facilitator/mentor (or whatever other name one wants to call them), who is centred and self-reflective who can create a place of trust where all feel like they belong.

Brookfield (1995, pp. 26-27) said:

> Critical reflection is inherently ideological. It is also morally grounded. It springs from a concern to create the conditions under which people can learn to love one another; and it alerts them to the forces that prevent this. Being anchored in values of justice, fairness and compassion, critical reflection finds its political representation in the democratic process.

Burns (1995, p. 237) said:

> Individuals need to reflect on experience in order to learn from it. The essence of learning from experience is to be found in the relationship between the learner and the context. The vital process is noticing, being aware of what has happened and taking action.

This allows relationships to be authentic secure in the knowledge that all will be treated with dignity and that every opinion, idea, thought and experience is valid to the individual and to the group and should be shared. Further I believe that these strategies only need to be employed in a community situation where reflection, feedback, support and interaction can be established.

This information generally represents my interpretation of the terminology and is meant only to give an entré into the terminology use in the field of holistic education theory and hopefully spark some reflection on your part regarding them and your own thoughts.

What is holistic education?

Although this is a very broad question I tend to follow the definition adopted by Eighty International Holistic Educators in Chicago, Illinois, June 1990. That is:

Holistic education is not one particular curriculum or methodology; it is a set of working assumptions, which include the following:

- Education is a dynamic, open human relationship.
- Education cultivates a critical awareness of the many contexts of learners' lives - moral, cultural, ecological, economic, technological, political.
- All persons hold vast multi-faceted potentials, which we are only beginning to understand.
- Human intelligence is expressed through diverse styles and capacities, all of which we need to respect.
- Holistic thinking involves contextual, intuitive, creative and physical ways of knowing.
- Learning is a lifelong process. All life situations may facilitate learning.
- Learning is both an inner process of self-discovery and a cooperative activity.
- Learning is active, self-motivated, supportive, and encouraging of the human spirit.
- A holistic curriculum is interdisciplinary, integrating both community and global perspectives.

(http://www.neat.tas.edu.au/HENT/chicago.htm, pp.1-2)

The Chicago group believed "Holistic education recognises that humans seek meaning, not just facts or skills, as an intrinsic aspect of their full and healthy development. We believe that only healthy, fulfilled human beings create a healthy society." (1990, p.1)

The ASCD Holistic Education Network defines holistic education as:

> Holistic Learning is based on the principle of interconnectedness and wholeness. Thus the student is seen as a whole person with body, mind, emotions and spirit. Holistic Learning seeks to develop approaches to teaching and learning that foster connections between subjects, between learners through various forms of community.

It goes on to say:

> Holistic Learning also seeks a dynamic balance in the learning situation between such elements as content and process, learning and assessment, and analytic and creative thinking. Finally, Holistic Learning is inclusive in terms of including a broad range of students and a variety of learning approaches to meet their diverse learning needs. (http://noisey.utoronto.ca/holistic/ascd.html. p.1,)

Finally Ron Miller (1991, p. 3) states:

> Education might be described as holistic when it demonstrates these four characteristics:
>
> 1. It nurtures the development of the whole person; it is concerned with intellectual as well as emotional, social, physical creative/intuitive, aesthetic and spiritual potentials.
> 2. It revolves around relationships between learners, between young people and adults. The teacher-student relationship tends to be egalitarian, open, dynamic in holistic settings, rather than bound by bureaucratic roles or authoritarian rules. A sense of community is essential.
> 3. It is concerned with life experience, not with narrowly defined "basic skills." Education is growth, discovery, and a widening of horizons; it is engagement with the world, a quest for understanding and meaning. This quest goes far beyond the limited horizons of conventional curricula, textbooks and standardised exams.
> 4. It enables learners to critically approach the cultural, moral and political contexts of their lives. It recognises that cultures are created by people and can be changed by people if they fail to serve important human needs. In contrast, conventional education aims only to replicate the established culture in the next generation.

The aforementioned ideas of Burns and Brookfield about critical reflection fit right in with the above statements about holistic education. Already there is an emerging link between holistic philosophy and more mainstream education theory. Perhaps holistic education isn't as radical or 'out-there' as some would think.

Lifelong learning and Indigenous people

Learning paradigm

Unlike 'western' societies and cultures Indigenous cultures are community-based they utilise wholistic approaches to integrate aspects of spiritualism, knowledge, skills, law and responsibility into a seamless cloth of experience. They utilise a practical, experiential methodology of seeing, doing and feedback. They are able to utilise this methodology to adapt to any situation. This methodology is appropriate to the

environment in which the people find themselves and to any new circumstance that may arise.

Indigenous culture was and is constantly evolving in order to adapt to the environments that the society finds itself in. Traditionally this would be weather pattern change, seasonal change, the ebb and flow of life, natural disasters etc, later it would involve adaptation to sharing country with a colonising power. Currently Indigenous cultures, like non-Indigenous cultures, all over the world are evolving to adapt to the technological revolution and integrate aspect that may be useful into their society. Eventually symbolism for this technology will appear in stories used to pass on traditional knowledge to future generations.

According to Cajete, (1994, p. 21) "Traditional systems of Indian education represent ways of learning and doing through a Nature-centred philosophy." It would be easy for us to dismiss this as some form of trendy Eco-education and therefore not relevant to mainstream life. Nature-centred philosophy is much more than that. Rather than being mere 'environmental' philosophy, 'Nature-centred philosophy' is the grounding of all behaviour in the notion of 'Mitakuye Oyasin' – "We are all related". This Native American expression describes the inclusiveness that pervades the thoughts of Indigenous peoples. That everything is connected people, animals, birds, fish, rocks, plants, the Earth and the air we breathe etc. Human beings live *with* the other natural species on earth and all need to be respected. This, of course, is diametrically opposed to modern 'western' philosophies that we are the only species that matter and all others may be used to ensure our comfort and well being. It is Mitakuye Oyasin, unity with the world around them, that has provided the support for Indigenous people in an atmosphere of reciprocity.

In many Indigenous cultures the skills and knowledge that are needed to survive are integrated into daily life and passed down through the community and generations by active participation and verbal feedback. The community members work together to gain knowledge and skills, and this benefits both the individuals and the community. Their learning is relayed to the other community members so they may benefit from and utilise the learning, which occurred as a by-product of the process. Action learning strategies emphasise the learning, which occurs when a person experiences the *process* of an action: whether the action is familiar or alien to them, each time the event occurs there is learning. It was with this background that Indigenous children learned social relationships and responsibilities. Each young person would have a "mentor" an older person who owned certain traditional skills. The "apprentice" would acquire the skills from the mentor. Observation and imitation of the older person's actions in an environment of concrete contexts facilitated their learning and the unique cultures of each family group were maintained this way.

Modern Education needs to be relevant to the learner, to their aspirations, to their community's and to their own future needs. In its current form, much Western education

is a more insidious form of 'ethnic cleansing'. Cajete believes that this kind traditional western education fails to capitalise on the natural ability of the students that pass through the schools. It also restricts industry from accessing a creative and dynamic workforce and finally adds to the 'ethnostress' that Indians continue to suffer leading to community disintegration and self-destructive behaviour. These actions have a 'knock-on' effect to society generally depriving it of effective citizens. This is similar to the stresses felt by all people on marginalised communities when industry and services leave their communities. The alienation felt by Indigenous people as they interact with the mainstream education system in 'western' countries can often be experienced by non-Indigenous people as well.

So can we learn anything from cultures that have been marginalised for so long? The mere fact that there are still Indigenous people in the world should move us to cry "YES".

Harris, (1990) said "the Aboriginal world view [is] that the environment [is] something to be co-operated with and related to, rather than dominated.

Community leadership

If we want to revitalise our communities we need active community leaders who work for and with the community. The leaders need to serve the community and encourage a new paradigm of living where participation is the norm and mutual respect and support are the foundations the communities are based on.

Cajete, (1994, p. 26) explains the link between education and community life:

> American Indian education historically occurred in a holistic social context that developed the importance of each individual as a contributing member of the social group. Tribal education sustained a wholesome life process. It was an educational process that unfolded through mutual, reciprocal relationships between one's social group and the natural world. This relationship involved all dimensions of one's being, while providing both personal development and technical skills through *participation* in community life. It was essentially a communally integrated expression of environmental education.

Members of the community need to know that they can affect their own situation through the democratic process. The apathy around politics is caused by the distance between the people and the policy makers and is exacerbated be career politicians who have little notion of the affects of their actions on the micro worlds of their electors. Politicians are spending too much time being politicians to do real good for the people.

As a counterpoint Marcel Guay in personal correspondence says:

> ...all Indigenous Government was based on ...consensus, which in turn depended on total freedom of the individual. Each free individual had to feel a Government decision fit with his or her understanding of their personal responsibility for all creatures, plants or "creation" in general.
>
> If consensus was the means to making an executive decision, the values of Indigenous people in the Government was based on principles or values of each individual being responsible for maintaining creation in a free state, and then the values like the importance of extended family, respect for wisdom both of individuals and of those Elders from the past.

Where, in the current system of Government is the allowance to incorporate the knowledge and experience of those in our communities who have wisdom of years and experience? Anywhere? Perhaps, if they wanted to enter the cut and thrust of politics but not if they want to lead their lives out of the spotlight and drama. Where did these people lose their right to be community leaders? Not politicians but respected ordinary people whose ideas, thoughts and experience is valued.

Cajete, (1994, p. 175) writes:

> Indigenous leadership was about commitment to nurturing a healthy community and enriching the cultural tradition of one's people. Indigenous leadership was about service and support of community values and life. Indigenous leaders were predisposed to care deeply and imagine richly with regard to their people. They listened to their own visions and the visions of their people; they use their imagination and creativity; and they gathered the people and moved them together to find their life.

Many people would say that this encapsulates the role of the community leader. It could be posited further that if many of the communities in, so called, first world societies had leaders that could take a role like the one outlined above many social problems that occur often would be reduced or removed from our streets.

In the western paradigm of Government citizens elect their representatives who make the important decisions about how the communities and the country will be run, for them. Decisions about who to elect are often made after hearing endless 'sound bites' of superficial often negative 'spin', presented in the ever-increasing tabloid media. This information is now packaged not just for local consumption but also for the international audience by multinational media conglomerates. The march of globalisation goes on.

Kahn-Tineta Horn explained to me in personal conversations that the Mohawk people of Canada believe that any decision that is made in the community needs two things:

- Firstly, It needs to be agreed by *all* members of the community. In negotiations a spokesperson will be chosen on a daily basis from the community and all members of the community will be fully informed of all developments.
- And secondly any decision made it is not just judged on how it will affect the community today but also what effect it will have on the community for the next *seven generations*.

The criteria used in all decision making are:

- Peace, (how will the decision affect the peace of the community, the land and the surrounding people).
- Righteousness, (is the decision morally and ethically right).
- Power, (how will this decision affect the power in the region – will power over the community's affairs be devolved to or taken by someone else as a result of this decision).

Two seemingly simple notions backed up by three basic criteria, yet they shape Indigenous culture in a way that is completely alien to modern western ideals. The idea that decision could be made by consensus based on moral considerations does not fit in with the rush for the few to make obscene amounts of money quickly.

Oral tradition

Oral tradition used to be something that all cultures embraced. Somewhere along the line it disappeared from western culture to be replaced with radio, TV, films and computer games no doubt. This and the faster pace of life we find ourselves having to conform to. Fragmented living of unit blocks, shift work and flexi-time contribute to many people not even knowing their neighbours name let alone ever having a conversation with them. Families often will not sit down at the same time, even for meals, is it any wonder oral tradition has disappeared. Taylor and Spry from Community Aid Abroad say "If you give kids language, you give them identity; you give them a sense of pride, of self-esteem." This is what the oral tradition of Indigenous culture did for the Aboriginal people around the world.

It is the oral nature of Indigenous culture, which has kept it alive through the impact of 'western' religion, assimilation, and 'western' education policies? Culture and ceremony are passed from one generation to the next orally, through art and dance. When Indigenous people have been allowed to get together they will talk, telling stories that convey, not only the overt moral aspect of the story or the entertainment value, but matters of deep cultural significance. Stories convey language, myth and morals. They reinforce the position of the individual in relation to their family, clan, language group and the natural elements surrounding them. One wonders if oral tradition was more of a feature of the current paradigm for western cultures whether the levels of morals and ethics would be greater and our social problems would be reduced.

The key point about oral culture is it brings the community together to talk and listen. Cajete, (1994, p. 169) states:

> Indigenous community is about living a symbiotic life in the context of a symbolic culture that includes the natural world as a necessary and vital participant… Through a rich and dynamic oral tradition, Indigenous communities reflected the stages of creative evolution …The oral tradition became an essential aspect of traditional teaching. Thus the story becomes a source of content and methodology for Indigenous community education. Story allows individual life, community life and the life process found in the natural world to be used as primary vehicles for the transmission of Indigenous culture.

Who would deny that humans lead a symbiotic life with other species and the earth itself? Who would deny 'western' or modern culture has its stories? Not many I think. Science is stories, religion is stories, art is stories and technology is stories. People's lives and experiences are stories. Every day people learn from these things, they are learning through stories. The fact that many people learn better through practical work indicates that 'stories' are better heard from a skilled orator than 'read'. This translates to people learning by doing, experiencing the story as a participant. Oral tradition ensures people come together in a non-confrontational way to share knowledge.

Convergence between holistic education and Indigenous methodologies

As I mentioned earlier others, and I believe there are similarities between holistic education and Indigenous methodologies. If we return to the Chicago statement we may explore that theory. It said:

- Education is a dynamic, open human relationship.

Indigenous culture is based on open human relationships. Its longevity through adversity shows it is dynamic and the education methodologies it employs are the core of that dynamism.

- Education cultivates a critical awareness of the many contexts of learners' lives - moral, cultural, ecological, economic, technological, political.

Indigenous education methodology is based in learning in context. It is impossible for people brought up in this paradigm to not be aware of the many contexts that intersect their lives. These methodologies also underpin the moral and cultural aspects of their communities and lives. Finally these methodologies reinforce the concept of the interconnectedness of all things including the environment and their economic livelihood.

- All persons hold vast multi-faceted potentials, which we are only beginning to understand.

- Human intelligence is expressed through diverse styles and capacities, all of which we need to respect.

These two points may be considered together. Indigenous societies have always been accepting of those within their communities that are different. These people would have accepted a role in the community, which was appropriate to their nature. The nature of Indigenous culture is that those with particular skills and potential were used to share that knowledge with other members of the community to enrichen it as a whole.

- Holistic thinking involves contextual, intuitive, creative and physical ways of knowing.
- Learning is a lifelong process. All life situations may facilitate learning.
- Learning is both an inner process of self-discovery and a co-operative activity.

These three points may be considered together, in that Indigenous methodologies utilise learning by doing, in context, with feedback and then facilitated the sharing of this knowledge to others. Knowledge and skills were gained by experience and adapting wat was already known to new circumstances. This methodology allowed the individual and the community to grow intellectually and practically. In this situation learning was a lifelong activity.

- Learning is active, self-motivated, supportive, and encouraging of the human spirit.

This point has been alluded to through the others but the fact that many Indigenous societies remain vital and active illustrates that the methodologies they employ are encouraging of the human spirit.

- A holistic curriculum is interdisciplinary, integrating both community and global perspectives.

Again this has been alluded to before. Indigenous cultures utilised methodology that integrated a global and community perspective in order to maintain their society and not destroy their Country, which supported them. Of course one's global perspective is constrained by ones knowledge and experience.

Making it work in the 21st Century to revitalise our communities

How can we, as educationalists, tap into these aspects of Indigenous culture and holistic education and utilise those strategies to revitalise marginalised communities? Mintz, (2000, p.43) quoting Edward Holmes, from the turn of the century in England when he said:

> In nine schools out of ten, on nine days out of ten, in nine lessons out of ten. The teacher is engaged in laying thin films of information on the surface of the child's

> mind and, after a brief interval, he is skimming these off in order to satisfy himself that they have been duly laid.

Although almost one hundred years old for many people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous this kind of experience of education is still a reality. Western education methodologies centre on the memorising and recall of certain facts in an abstract setting. This methodology is alien to Indigenous thinking and followers of Indigenous wisdom alien to a meaningful existence as a whole human being. Greg Cajete, (1994, pp. 188-189) says:

> Alienation from mainstream approaches to education have been one of the consistent criticisms leveled against modern education by Indian students... Too often the Indian student is viewed as the problem, rather than the unquestioned approaches, attitudes and curricula of the educational system. The knowledge, values, skills, and interests that Indian students possess are largely ignored in favour of strategies aimed at enticing them to conform to mainstream education.

He goes on to say:

> The inherent worth and creative potential of Indian students and Indian perspectives of education have not been given serious consideration by mainstream education. As a result, many of the brightest and most creative Indian students continue to be alienated from modern education.

Cajete believes that this kind of behaviour by the educational establishment fails to capitalise on the natural ability of the students that pass through the schools. It also restricts industry from accessing a creative and dynamic workforce and finally adds to the 'ethnostress' that Indians continue to suffer leading to community disintegration and self-destructive behaviour. These actions have a 'knock-on' effect to society generally depriving it of effective citizens. This is similar to the stresses felt by all people on marginalised communities when industry and services leave their communities. I believe that much of what Cajete says here for Indigenous people is true for non-Indigenous people as well. There are many people who do not fit in well with the western paradigm of education. This, in turn does indeed have a knock on effect for industry. If our education system essentially still follows the model Holmes described how can we expect our workforce to adapt to the changing nature of the workplace that comes with globalisation. If our workforce is not up to the tasks set for it by this paradigm the forces of industry will relocate and thus our communities will become marginalised.

Cajete, (1994, p. 18) says:

> Modern education and traditional education can no longer afford to remain historically and contextually separate entities. Every community must integrate the

> learning occurring through modern education with the cultural bases of knowledge and value orientations essential to perpetuate its way of life. A balanced integration must be created.

Marcel Guay, in personal correspondence said:

> ...We must re-integrate the predominant culture by asserting Indigenous knowledge and methods into it. Right now the educational system is in a "problem" of disassociation, that is it is a training program for people to learn to deal with future bosses and work situations. Indigenous education is mainly aimed at producing a whole individual with the idea that an individual progresses through difficulties with the purpose in mind to have a more complete or balanced understanding of life...the environment, relationships and so on.

To paraphrase Marcel Guay, again in personal correspondence:

> [Communities must revive true citizenship by], researching and applying democratic methods of Government and educating the people about it.
>
> [Communities] must assume their responsibilities to govern by consensus and in the light of [their traditional] values.
>
> [Communities] must support the extended family, respect wisdom, education and sharing.

If we do not learn from the experiences of our Indigenous peoples then communities, human kind and the world are probably doomed to march in ever-decreasing circle down the plug hole of self destruction.

To paraphrase Roger Stack (of the Holistic Education Network Discussion List), in personal correspondence, "We [need to] move to engage others as together we co-create our preferred future holistic education system." My view is we can recreate our communities based on inclusiveness and participation in an environment of support and dialogue. We need to create true 'learning communities' where human relationships are the catalyst for the gaining of knowledge through self-discovery and co-operative activity supported by feedback and critical reflection by individuals and the whole community. Communities need to 'make their own education and learn from eachother' (Dufty, 2000, personal communication).

Vasily Sukhomlinsky said:

> I firmly believe that the human personality is inexhaustible: each may become a creator, leaving behind a trace upon the earth...There should not be any nobodies

> – specks of dust cast upon the wind. Each one must shine, just as billions upon billions of galaxies shine in the heavens. (1999, p. 68)

He also said:

> A person is being truly educated only when they pass their knowledge, experience and mastery on to someone else. One only begins to sense one's creative powers and abilities when one enters into moral relations with another person, becomes concerned about increasing their spiritual wealth. (p. 92)

Sukhomlinsky did much of his work in the middle of the last century against a backdrop of communism but his connection with the aesthetic and moral development is strong as well as the idea of sharing knowledge in order to become whole. According to Cockerill he "The core of [his approach] involved sensitising his students to beauty in nature, in art, in human relations, and encouraging students to take responsibility for the living environment… [he] taught his students that the most precious thing in life is a human being, and that there is no greater honour than to bring joy to other people." (2000, p. 1).

Surely we must grasp the aesthetic and moral high ground and restructure our communities to change, heal, learn and grow from within them. Holistic educational approaches can support this growth.

The Four Worlds Institute for Human and Community Development, an organisation that, in 1982, formed with representatives from over forty Indian Nations. It has been able, using an Indigenous worldview which is strikingly similar to that supported by holistic educators to restrict and in many cases remove the 'social devastation brought on by alcohol, poverty, and increasing powerlessness' from their tribal communities. They believe "Learning is at the very heart of sustainable human change processes and human beings are multi-dimensional learning beings, physically, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually and volitionally." (Four Worlds Institute, 1990).

An article by Lyn Hancock on the Nunatsieq Website gives the following examples of Indigenous culture and traditional knowledge in action.

> Elders are the main custodians of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ) [traditional knowledge]. Elders can be found in schools teaching…language and …culture. They're on the land helping biologists…They're in the courtroom counselling offenders and advising judges on culturally appropriate sentences. And they're at outpost camps teaching survival techniques, developing self-esteem and promoting pride in the traditional Inuit lifestyle. Elders are being consulted in the legislature and in the mining camps, lighting qulliqs and drum dancing at important community events, creating and selling modern clothing, and arts and crafts, but with traditional designs.

> ...IQ is not just content, it is method, style, and as one person said, out of it comes our Inuitness.
> (http://www.nunatsieq.com/nunavutnow/traditional.html)

So some Indigenous communities are beginning to look at the state they are in and return to their more traditional methodologies, adapting them for the 21st century and using them to revitalise their communities. For of all our future generations we need to do the same.

Conclusion

Paulo Freire, (1972 a, pp.72-73) stated:

> The right in its rigidity prefers the dead to the living; the static to the dynamic; the future as a repetition of the past rather than a creative venture; pathological forms of love rather than real love; frigid schematization rather than the emotion of living; gregariousness rather than authentic living together; organisation men rather than men who organise; imposed myths rather than incarnated values; directives rather than creative and communicative language; and slogans rather than challenges.

Although this is a rather extreme view of the 'right' as he calls it the same could be said of the industrialised drivers of the globalisation phenomenon. Proponents of globalisation will maintain that it is dynamic, a new paradigm and exciting. When in reality the same forces are exerting more pressure on more people in more places around the world at the same time, nullifying opportunities for small businesses and communities to live a whole life based on traditional values and communitarianism.

Modern western society needs to move from reductionist, mechanistic and sedentary education to dynamic, practical, holistic education, which is relevant to the learner and their individual situation. Communities need to come together into real living, learning communities rather than disparate groupings of individuals. Community members need to talk to each other, take action to solve their problems at the source in a democratic and inclusive manner, not apportioning blame but seeking solutions. People in today's societies must reconnect with their environment. They must recognise, accept and take responsibility for the effect that each individual action will have on themselves, their community and their environment for generations to come.

If the human race is to survive this millennium there needs to be a major paradigm shift away from the doctrines of 'the right' to the community based approaches of Indigenous peoples. Individuals need to be allowed to foster and grow in such a way that they feedback to their communities enriching themselves, the community and the world around them.

Ywahoo (1987, p. 187) says:

> In these busy times many people's vast potential goes untapped because of fear of death. This unreal fear of what will eventually befall everyone hinders a person's full participation in life, so that one may be afraid to try because thinking of possible failure. The wise person cultivates each moment of life an as opportunity to see the nature of mind and relationships. In Tsalagi [Cherokee] culture it is said that it takes fifty-one years to become a fully-fledged member of society. Thus long life is assumed, and one is encouraged to live each day as if it were the last.

In marginalised communities the members may not be thinking of death as a consequence of their actions but they do feel impotent and useless. If we can increase the social capital in these communities we may be able to transform its members into a proactive action learning group who see each moment of life as a opportunity. Furthermore if we can re-establish the role of the 'elder' of all the communities we can return respect for those who have gone before and those with a lifetime of experience to share.
Let us hope the traces we leave will be seen for millennia in a positive light.

Mitakuye Oyasin.

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